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Library School

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You Gotta Go To School For That?

by **Jerry Seay** (Planet Earth)

*Well, y'all we would like to announce IN BIG LETTERS the addition of A LIBRARY SCHOOL STUDENT to the editorial staff of **Against the Grain**. **Jerry Seay** is a graduate student in Library Science at the University of South Carolina in Columbia, SC, as well as a library technical assistant at the College of Charleston Library. He will give us his perspective from time to time.*

One slow, summer day I was sitting at the OPAC information desk minding my own business (as best as one can mind one's own business at an information desk) when a quite frustrated elderly gentleman asked me for help with the online catalog. He seemed to be very apprehensive of computers. I gathered this not from any great observational powers on my part, but by the fact that he kept mumbling something about "these damn computer things."

Of course, I didn't have the heart (nor the guts) to tell this poor soul that I had only been working there for a few weeks as an LTA and that this was only my second day on the information desk ("the best way to learn is OJT") and I didn't know much more about those "damn computer things" than he did. He did seem to appreciate my attempts at assistance, however, despite the fact that I only seemed to confuse us both even more.

He finally turned to me and said, "You know, this whole thing would be a lot easier if a body just knew how the guy was thinkin' when he put all this stuff in here."

I agreed, and I told him as much. I was also thinking that it would be nice to know how to do what I was supposed to be doing. Thus, "how the guy (gal) put all this stuff in the library and made it work" has compelled me to attend library school. I am finding it all fascinating.

Ellen Crosby, one of my professors at The USC, tells us that library

school is all about learning the "secret knowledge" that only librarians know. I am learning, though, that not everyone appreciates our "secret knowledge." A few months ago while I was diligently working on my internship in acquisitions, a student worker asked, of all things, what I was doing. When I proudly informed her of my noble calling to library school, she got a puzzled look on her face. Then she said, "You mean you gotta go to school for that? I mean, how hard can it be?" So much for impressing her with the scholarly importance of my calling.

But library school has scholarly importance! My professors tell me that one of the marks of a true profession is that it has its own special language. Librarians definitely meet that criterion! Our "secret knowledge" you see, is in code. And learning to use it properly is an art form. Being rather artistically inclined, I learned quickly that I could join ALA, ACRL, LAMA, LITA, RASD, YASD, or IFLA; I could get on OCLC and talk to RLIN, Dialog, or BRS; and I could interface with BIP, Psych-Lit, LISA, or Infotrak on a CD-ROM connected to a LAN and do it PDQ. (For common English translation, write your nearest CIA, FBI, or ALA office.)

The most amazing thing I have learned thus far in library school is about acquisitions and Ireland. Chuck Leachman of EBSCO gave my technical services class an excellent explanation of the process of

serials acquisitions. We stared incredulously upon hearing that after receiving our serial orders and removing the checks for quick deposit, the fulfillment centers (what a name!) in the Midwest repackage our orders and send them to Ireland to be processed. The folks in Ireland then send them back to the U.S. for distribution. I just love this global village!

You could not have told me five years ago that I was going to be a librarian. Some people I tell find it hard to believe now. "You're gonna do what? You gotta go to school for that?" Sometimes I try to tell them about the "secret knowledge" I'm learning. Sometimes it's hard to convince people that I am going to school to learn more than how to help people check out books.

My best friend from high school in Illinois understood my excitement when I told him that I was going to library school. "Sounds like it's right up your alley," he said. "Now I can call you 'Conan the Librarian.' And guess what? I'm going to medical school." He paused for effect while I suppressed my shock.

"Medical School?" I said finally. "You gotta go to school for that?"

